

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS

1. A telephony system, comprising:
a service node configured to communicate with a user device and provide a user associated with the user device with an automated voice interface to the telephony system upon the user's initiating access to the telephony system via the user device,
wherein the automated voice interface is configured to permit the user to verbally specify a desired objective corresponding to any one of a plurality of predefined objectives, the predefined objectives including directory assisted call placement and at least one form of information retrieval,
and wherein, upon receiving the desired objective from the user, the service node acts to implement the desired objective.
2. The telephony system according to claim 1, wherein the user device is a wireline telephone, and wherein the user initiates access to the telephony system by taking the wireline telephone off hook.
3. The telephony system according to claim 1, wherein the user device is a wireless telephone, and wherein the user initiates access to the telephony system by dialing a predefined key sequence.
4. The telephony system according to claim 1, further comprising:
a switch coupled to the user device and the service node, the switch being configured to detect the user's initiating access to the telephony system via the user device.
5. The telephony system according to claim 4, wherein the user device is a wireline telephone, and wherein the switch is a service switching point.

6. The telephony system according to claim 4, wherein the user device is a wireless telephone, and wherein the switch is a mobile switching center.

7. The telephony system according to claim 4, further comprising a service control point in communication with both the switch and the service node.

8. The telephony system according to claim 7, wherein the switch is further configured to pass information identifying the user device to the service control point upon detecting the user's having initiated access to the telephony system via the user device.

9. The telephony system according to claim 8, wherein the service control point is further configured to verify a voice interface service subscription for the user device prior to setting up a communication channel between the service node and the switch.

10. The telephony system according to claim 9, wherein the switch, the service control point, and the service node communicate in accordance with standard Advanced Intelligent Network protocols.

11. The telephony system according to claim 1, wherein when the user specifies a desired objective of directory assisted call placement, the service node is configured to: request, by voiced instruction, the user's verbal specification of a destination, retrieve a telephone number associated with the verbally specified destination, and initiate connection of the user device to a device corresponding to the retrieved number.

12. The telephony system according to claim 1, wherein the at least one form of information retrieval includes at least one of retrieval of Internet search results, retrieval of market results, retrieval of driving directions, retrieval of weather conditions, retrieval of account

data, retrieval of personal contact information, retrieval of e-mail messages, and retrieval of service order status.

13. The telephony system according to claim 1, wherein when the user specifies a desired objective relating to information retrieval, the service node is configured to:

request, by voiced instruction, the user's verbal specification of an information item, retrieve the verbally specified information item from an information source, and voice the information item to the user via the user device.

14. The telephony system according to claim 1, wherein the predefined objectives further include at least one form of taking action.

15. The telephony system according to claim 14, wherein the at least one form of taking action includes at least one of placing an order, modifying a database, synchronizing two or more databases, and sending a message.

16. The telephony system according to claim 14, wherein when the user specifies a desired objective relating to taking action, the service node is configured to:

request, by voiced instruction, the user's verbal specification of a particular task, and initiate implementation of the verbally specified task.

17. The telephony system according to claim 1, wherein the predefined objectives further include at least one instance of voice-activated call placement.

18. The telephony system according to claim 17, wherein when the user specifies a desired objective corresponding to a particular instance of voice-activated call placement, the

service node is configured to initiate connection of the user device to a destination device associated with the particular instance of direct voice-activated call placement.

19. A service node for use in a telephony system including a switch, the switch providing system access for a user device, the service node comprising:

logic configured to communicate, via the switch, with the user device and to provide a user of the telephony system with an automated voice interface upon the user's initiating access to the telephony system via the user device,

wherein the automated voice interface is configured to permit the user to verbally specify a desired objective corresponding to any one of a plurality of predefined objectives, the predefined objectives including call placement and at least one form of information retrieval,

and wherein, upon receiving the desired objective from the user, the service node acts to implement the desired objective.

20. The service node according to claim 19, wherein the switch is a service switching point providing system access for at least one wireline telephone.

21. The service node according to claim 19, wherein the switch is a mobile switching center providing system access for at least one wireless telephone.

22. The service node according to claim 19, further comprising a control interface configured to communicate with a service control point of the telephony system.

23. The service node according to claim 22, wherein the service node establishes communication with the user device upon receiving instruction from the service control point.

24. The service node according to claim 22, wherein the service node communicates with the switch and the service control point in accordance with standard Advanced Intelligent Network protocols.

25. A method of providing a user of a telephony system with an automated voice interface, comprising:

- voicing a request to the user, upon the user's initiating access to the telephony system, that the user identify an intended objective;
- awaiting the user's response to the voiced request;
- selecting, based upon the user's response, one of a plurality of predefined objectives, the predefined objectives including directory assisted call placement and at least one form of information retrieval; and
- acting to implement the selected objective.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein the at least one form of information retrieval includes at least one of retrieval of Internet search results, retrieval of market results, retrieval of driving directions, retrieval of weather conditions, retrieval of account data, retrieval of personal contact information, retrieval of e-mail messages, and retrieval of service order status.

27. The method of claim 25 wherein, when the selected objective is directory assisted call placement, the acting to implement the selected objective comprises:

- voicing to the user a request that the user verbally identify a destination,
- retrieving a telephone number associated with the destination, and
- using the retrieved number to initiate a call between the user and the destination.

28. The method of claim 25 wherein, when the selected objective is a form of information retrieval, the acting to implement the objective comprises:

requesting, by voiced instruction, the user's verbal specification of an information item, retrieving the verbally specified information item from an information source, and voicing the retrieved information item to the user.

29. A telephony system, comprising:
means for detecting a user's initiating access to the telephony system;
means for soliciting, upon the user's initiating access to the system, the user's verbal specification of one of a plurality of predefined objectives, the predefined objectives including directory assisted call placement and at least one form of information retrieval; and
means for implementing the verbally specified objective.

30. A computer-readable medium including a plurality of instructions that, when executed by a service node in a telephony system, cause the service node to function as an automated telephone attendant, the computer-readable medium comprising:
instructions for voicing a request to a telephone user that the user state an intended objective;
instructions for selecting, based upon the user's stated objective, one of a plurality of predefined objectives, the predefined objectives including directory assisted call placement and at least one form of information retrieval; and
instructions for acting to implement the selected objective.